

Customary for Deacons

Diocese of Los Angeles

Vision Statement

“A deacon is a baptized person called and empowered by God and the Church to be a model of Christ’s servant ministry for all people. As agents of God’s compassion and reconciling grace, deacons are missionaries to the world and messengers to the Church of the world’s needs, hopes, and concerns. In the Church, deacons call forth, empower, and inspire the baptized to respond to these needs. The role of the deacon in liturgy mirrors this role of the deacon in the Church and world. Deacons are living symbols of Christ’s presence as they embody Christ’s servant ministry and point to the presence of Christ in those they serve.” ~ *Association for Episcopal Deacons*

Introduction

Order of Deacons: Coming from the Greek, *diakonos*, the word deacon means “servant” or “envoy”. Deacons are not those who alone do the work of the Church in the world; rather, they gather, lead, equip, and inform the baptized in that work. In all their work, deacons enhance the ministry of the laity; they do not supplant it. In accordance with Title III, Canon 6 of *The Episcopal Church Constitution and Canons*, deacons must be academically trained in the Holy Scriptures, theology, and the traditions of the Church. They must also be familiar with *diakonia* and the diaconate, demonstrate human awareness and understanding, exemplify spiritual development and discipline, and undergo extensive practical training and experience.

Because the diaconate is usually non-stipendiary, those called to this ministry must exhibit the energy necessary for work both inside and outside the Church. Deacons serve under the authority of the Bishop, and are assigned in the diocese where needed. Deacons will, in most cases, work with parish priests, and the capacity to work comfortably in that relationship is fundamental.

Deacons are expected to live a *Rule Of Life*, which includes prayer, immersion in Scripture, and self examination with the help of a Spiritual Director. Deacons will also seek regular continuing education opportunities in order to grow in their vocation. They will also participate in the diocesan Community of Deacons as fully as possible.

The diaconate is a distinct order and not a stepping stone to the priesthood. Likewise, the diaconate is not a reward for faithful lay ministry. Nor is it to be seen as a reward for pre-existing servant ministry. The individual aspiring to the Sacred Order of Deacons must clearly articulate and demonstrate that he or she is called to the order of ministry which is personified by servant ministry, *diakonia*.

Purpose of the Customary

This diaconal customary is a description of the working role and common practice of deacons in relationship to the Bishop, clergy, parishes, and missions of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles. The customary was created by the Los Angeles Diocesan Deacons' Council. It has been approved by Bishop J. Jon Bruno and by the Council for use in this diocese.

In composing the diaconal customary we borrowed with permission from the customaries of the Diocese of Chicago, the Diocese of Western Michigan, The Diocese of Western New York, and the Diocese of Maine. We wish to express our gratitude for their generosity.

Discernment, Formation and Deployment

In the Diocese of Los Angeles, persons who expect to exercise diaconal ministry for the duration of their active service are termed **DEACONS**. Those who are serving diaconal ministry for a period of time (usually 6-12 months) as part of their formation for priesthood are termed **TRANSITIONAL DEACONS**. The order of ministry is the same in both cases; but policies, procedures, avenues of formation and lines of accountability differ greatly between the two, so consistency in using these distinct designations is vital.

Discernment and Formation of Deacons

Deacons are often at work in risky places and at the margins, responding to the needs of the poor, the weak, the addicted, the sick, and the lonely, thus enabling them to discover the presence of God in their world. Deacons are called to engage the issues of justice, mercy, poverty, family, and the environment. Increasingly, the role is one of opening doors of opportunity, encouraging others to take risks, and serving as agents of change. A person identified with having a vocation to the diaconate would be recognized by him/herself and by the church as meeting a set of fundamental requirements. Each nominee will be interviewed by the Commission on Ministry and if the Commission on Ministry determines approval, the nominee is made a postulant. The Commission on Ministry then develops an individual formation plan for each diaconal postulant. All postulants will attend the Deacon's Seminar during their period of formation.

Specific requirements are described in the following documents:

- The Episcopal Constitution and Canons, Title III, Canon VI.
- Book of Common Prayer 1979, Ordination of a Deacon: Examination. Pg. 543
- "Discerning the Call A discernment guide to faith communities,"* Commission On Ministry, the Diocese of Los Angeles
- *"Discernment and Formation Process for Deacons,"* Commission On Ministry, the Diocese of Los Angeles.

Deployment of Deacons

The Bishop, after consultation with the Deacon, the Archdeacon, and the presbyter or other leader exercising oversight, may assign a Deacon to one or more congregations, other communities of faith, or non-parochial ministries. (Title III, Canon 8.4) The Bishop may re-assign a Deacon, or the Deacon may request re-assignment, at anytime. The gifts, talent, and experience of a Deacon will be considered in deployment decisions, as well as the ministry needs of the diocese.

The Bishop has the authority to appoint Deacons to ministry in congregations, upon request of, or with concurrence of, the priest, vestry, or bishops' committee of the congregation. The congregation to which the Deacon is appointed may or may not be the same congregation from which the deacon is raised up and sponsored for ordination. A letter of agreement (LOA) will be developed for each deacon and congregation in consultation with the priest-in-charge, the Deacon, and the Archdeacon. (See Appendix A) Completed LOA are submitted to the Bishop for approval.

Deacons are not relieved of their appointed ministry except by action of the Bishop. In the event of any concerns about a Deacon's service in a congregation, the Bishop will be consulted promptly. The Bishop may consult with the Archdeacon regarding such circumstances. Deacons are subject to ecclesiastical discipline according to Title IV of the National Canons and appropriate Diocesan Canons.

Responsibility of the Parish

It is expected that the Deacon will be reimbursed by the parish for expenses related to his/her service, including reimbursement for mileage, expenses of attending diocesan convention, and the annual clergy conference. These matters should be specifically addressed in the Deacons' Letter of Agreement, as well as the number of hours the Deacon serves weekly. The

congregation should provide funding for continuing education for the Deacon (books, courses, etc.)

Consistent with the practices of other parish clergy, Deacons should also have access to a discretionary fund so they may receive and distribute funds in connection with their specific ministries. Ownership of discretionary accounts remains with the parish to which the Deacon is attached. (Manual of Business Methods in Church Affairs, Chapter 5, Section C.1) Additional responsibilities and roles within the congregation will be discussed, negotiated, and mutually agreed upon, between Deacon and clergy in charge. When a Deacon holds employment outside the parish, this role needs to be taken into account when negotiating the Deacon's parish agreements and requirements.

Ordained Deacons who arrive from other diocese into the Diocese of Los Angeles will quickly schedule an appointment with the Bishop and Archdeacon.

Social Ministry

It is expected that Deacons will exercise a social ministry in the world as well as undertaking a parish assignment. Deacons are encouraged to prayerfully consider what their social ministries might be, and to explore opportunities for such ministries. S/he is a person who understands that the diaconate is a life-long discernment of the direction of his or her ministry. The Deacon's social ministry shall fall under the general supervision of the Bishop.

In connection with Diocesan Convention, Deacons shall make an annual report in writing to the Bishop describing how both their social and parish ministries were exercised in the preceding year. Deacons may write letter updates to the Archdeacon and/ or Bishop describing insights they have gained about where the world is hurting and what the Church can do about it.

Deacons in the Liturgy

Deacons shall serve in the liturgies of the church as specified in the *Book of Common Prayer*. In such liturgies, Deacons shall proclaim the Gospel, shall set and clear the table for Eucharistic liturgies, and shall pronounce the dismissal. It is not appropriate for any of the liturgical responsibilities of the Deacon to be exercised by a priest when a Deacon is serving in the liturgy. Other liturgical roles shall be negotiated between the Deacon and the supervising priest, in consultation with the Bishop, as appropriate.

Preaching and prophetic voice

A Deacon is one who has the courage to be a prophetic voice to the church concerning the needs of the powerless and voiceless people in the community. It is expected that Deacons will be included in the preaching rota of the parish to which they are assigned. Because of the special nature of the Deacon's ministry, it is anticipated that they will bring their unique perspective to the interpretation of scripture and give voice to the needs, hopes, and concerns of the world.

Baptism

Deacons in the Los Angeles diocese may perform Baptisms with permission from the Bishop (*Book of Common Prayer, pg. 312*). Permission is granted for Deacons to perform this sacrament when Deacons have directly evangelized the candidate.

Communion from the Reserved Sacrament

Communion from the Reserved Sacrament given by Deacons as part of the parish's corporate worship is only permitted under special circumstances and only with the specific prior authorization of the Bishop. There is an example of a liturgy for this purpose located in this document. (*See Appendix B*).

Deacons in the Life of the Diocese

Upon ordination, Deacons begin their life in the diocese as active members of the clergy. As such, pastoral care for Deacon clergy and their families is provided by the Bishop and Archdeacon.

Deacons will be informed about, and are expected to attend, the annual diocesan convention, and are encouraged to attend diocesan clergy conferences and deanery meetings. It is expected that all persons planning diocesan functions and liturgical events will include Deacons, and will provide for appropriate participation according to the order.

Deacons are encouraged to take their place in the councils of the Church. These places might include appointed and elected positions on program groups and commissions of the diocese, the province, and/ or the national Church. In the Diocese of Los Angeles, Deacons are specifically required to:

- Send an annual report to the Bishop; (a form for this purpose is sent to all Deacons by the secretary of convention during the summer, and is returned as directed. In order to have voice and vote at Diocesan convention, this form must be received and recorded.)
 - Attend the annual Deacon's Day with the Bishop (usually scheduled near the feast of St. Phillip in the fall.)
 - Attend the Fresh Start program. (The Archdeacon and/ or Bishop will extend a letter of invitation with starting dates and other pertinent information.)
- The Bishop, in consultation with the Archdeacon, has formed the Deacon's Council to assist, support, and nurture the community of Deacons. Deacons will make every effort to serve on the Deacon's council as they are invited to do so.

Appendix 5 (b): Communion from Reserved Sacrament

After the Liturgy of the Word (and receiving of the people's offering), the deacon places the consecrated Sacrament on the Altar, during which time a communion hymn may be sung.

The officiating deacon then walks to a place in the midst of the Assembly, stands facing the Altar (with the Assembly standing), and invites them to join in the Litany of the Consecrated Gifts. This Litany below should be printed in the bulletin.

A Litany Before Receiving Holy Communion

Deacon We give thanks to you, O God, for all things good and beneficial to our bodies and souls.

Assembly **We thank you, O God.**

Deacon For the Body and Blood of Christ, set here before us;

Assembly **We thank you, O God.**

Deacon That you have brought us together in this place;

Assembly **We thank you, O God.**

Deacon That your eternal word was made flesh for us;

Assembly **We thank you, O God.**

Deacon For Christ's life and ministry, death and resurrection;

Assembly **We thank you, O God.**

Deacon That you fill our lives with grace and grant us the gift of the Holy Spirit;

Assembly **We thank you, O God.**

Deacon That through this Sacrament you grant us a pledge of our eternal inheritance.

Assembly **We thank you, O God.**

Deacon We pray, therefore in the words our Savior has taught us:

The officiating deacon leads the Assembly in the Lord's Prayer.

The officiating deacon then walks to the table, picks up the Bread and the Cup, faces the Assembly and says, "The Gifts of God for the People of God." There is no fraction or fraction anthem. Holy Communion is distributed to all who desire it by the officiating deacon and lay Eucharistic minister, as appropriate. Hymn(s) or anthem(s) may be sung during the distribution, according to congregation's custom.

After communion, the officiating deacon clears the Altar, leads the assembly in the Post-communion prayer (pp. 339, 365, or 366) and dismisses them.